

Testimony

House Bill 1456

House Human Services Committee

January 26, 2005; 8:30 a.m.

North Dakota Department of Health

Good morning, Chairman Price and members of the House Human Services Committee. My name is Jill Leppert, and I am with North Dakota Department of Health's Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity. I am also the breastfeeding coordinator for the department's Special Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children – or the WIC Program, as it is more commonly called. I am here today to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1456.

Benefits of Breast Milk

The North Dakota Department of Health supports mothers in their efforts to breastfeed their babies. Research shows that breast milk is best for babies and that breastfeeding is necessary for healthy infants, children and mothers. Research also indicates that feeding babies formula increases many health-related costs.

Nationally, the cost of treating diseases and conditions preventable by breastfeeding is more than \$3.6 billion a year. Breast milk protects children against asthma, allergies, diabetes and being overweight or obese. In addition, mothers who breastfeed their babies are less likely to develop breast cancer, ovarian cancer, thyroid cancer, osteoporosis and lupus.

Breastfeeding in North Dakota

One of the Healthy People 2010 goals is to achieve a breastfeeding rate of 75 percent across the nation. In North Dakota, breastfeeding rates have increased from 50 percent of new mothers in 1993 to 61 percent in 2002. However, mothers who begin breastfeeding their babies often do not continue. In fact, a 2002 survey of mothers enrolled in the WIC Program indicated that 57 percent initiated breastfeeding, but only 22 percent were still breastfeeding their babies six months later. In a 2001 survey, new mothers said that the main reason they quit breastfeeding (other than having problems with breastfeeding) was that they returned to work or school.

Expressing Milk in the Workplace

Not every mother is able to take her baby with her to work in order to continue breastfeeding. That's why it's important that mothers be supported at work in their efforts to express milk for their babies' later use.

Mothers who express their milk use either electronic or manual breast pumps. An experienced woman will take only about 15 minutes to express her milk using a double-cup electric pump. Expressing breast milk with a manual pump generally takes a little longer, but for some women this option works best.

Expressed breast milk can be stored safely in a portable cooler with ice packs, so a refrigerator at the worksite is not a necessity.

A room in which a mother can express her milk does not need to be a large space. The biggest concern would be to provide privacy for the mother while she is pumping. That can be done in an office or cubicle, behind a room divider, or in space set aside within a storage room. A do-not-disturb sign could provide added privacy.

Benefits to the Employer

Although pumping at work may not be possible in every job, studies have shown benefits for the employer, including:

- Reduced staff turnover and loss of skilled workers after the birth of children.
- Reduced sick time or personal leave for breastfeeding women because their infants are more resistant to illness.
- Lower health-care costs associated with healthier breastfed babies.
- Higher job productivity, employee satisfaction and morale.
- Added recruitment incentives for women.
- Lower insurance costs for breastfed babies.

Conclusion

Breastfeeding provides the best nutrition for babies and helps ensure healthy babies, children and mothers.

North Dakota has one of the highest rates of employment of mothers of young children. House Bill 1456 will provide these new mothers the support they need to continue breastfeeding their babies upon return to work or school.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.